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## Filmmaker gives Michigan's incentives 4 stars

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He isn't paying much attention to the debate smoldering behind the scenes of the state's nearly year-old film incentives, but Sam Kadi can tell you they have helped him immensely.

Kadi's been making movies in Michigan the past few years -- his newest short film "Raised Alone" is to make its debut at the Maple Theatre in Birmingham on March 24.

The effort, the latest from his company, Samer K Productions Inc., is one of the first to take advantage of Michigan's film incentives intended to provide a more attractive business climate for moviemakers with a goal of more jobs for a state in desperate need of nonautomotive business.

Kadi is the writer, producer and director of "Raised Alone," a short drama (36 minutes) about the relationship between a father and son who plays the violin.

He hesitates to say precisely how much he spent on it (or, rather, raised from his investors) other than to say it exceeded the \$50,000 threshold the state set to qualify for some incentives.

He is in the process of selling his first full-length feature film to investors -- many outside the state. He describes it as a drama.

Once the financial backing is secure, he hopes to shoot it in Michigan.

"This is my home. Why would I want to film anywhere else?" he said.

He added the budding film business is helping him in his bid to secure investors as more stars are taking a look at the state as a result of its incentives, which are the largest in the nation.

Clint Eastwood, Drew Barrymore, Sigourney Weaver, George Clooney and Hilary Swank have filmed in Michigan, building interest in the state's budding film business.

## Controversial move

Despite the stars, not everyone is applauding the incentives.

The Michigan Film Office reported last week that filmmakers qualified for \$48 million in payments from the state during the first 10 months of the incentive program.

The report said about \$125 million was spent on the projects, although an economic analysis commissioned by the state's Film Office said project spending totaled \$65.4 million. The report didn't say how the incentives are affecting the state budget.

State Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, the state Senate Finance Committee chairwoman, doesn't like that some out-of-state producers are getting rebate checks from the state for filming here at the same time many small businesses are being hit by the surcharge added to the Michigan Business Tax also adopted by state legislators last year.

She said she would rather have Lansing shift focus from helping Hollywood to giving small business a hand.

"This is a matter of robbing Peter -- the hardworking Michigander -- and paying Paul -- the slick Hollywood filmmaker," Cassis said.

## Those in favor

Supporters of the incentives say the total number of approved movies will result in an estimated \$435.7 million in sales and revenue for Michigan businesses.

"It's been a tremendous asset," said Robert Ficano, Wayne County executive. "The real meat and potatoes are the filming crews and structural buildings that are being talked about."

Indeed, there's talk about opening a facility in Allen Park.

Out Oakland County way, mall developer A. Alfred Taubman is involved with bringing a studio to Pontiac at the idled GM Centerpoint truck plant.

Ficano said he believes the film incentives have proved that lowering costs is an effective way to generate interest and should be used for other businesses.

And Kadi is here to report from his front-row seat that the incentives carry weight with his investors.

"The tax incentive is a huge motivation to bring money in from out-of-state investors," Kadi said.

The challenge now, said Kadi, is beefing up the postproduction skills of the area to keep up with demand and keep that work in the state.

"Michigan is used to commercial and industrial production rather than making movies," he said. "But I think that is starting to turn."

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